

# **IMPLEMENTATION TEAM CONFERENCE CALL NOTES**

**March 7, 2002**

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES  
PORTLAND, OREGON**

## ***1. Greeting and Introductions***

The March 7 Implementation Team conference call to discuss the issue, elevated at the March 6 TMT meeting, regarding spill operations in support of the upcoming Spring Creek Hatchery release, was chaired by John Palensky of NMFS and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a distillation, not a verbatim transcript, of items discussed at the meeting and actions taken. Anyone with questions or comments about these minutes should call Kathy Ceballos at 503/230-5420.

## ***2. Spring Creek Hatchery Spill Issue.***

Cindy Henriksen briefed the IT on yesterday's TMT discussion of SOR 2002-1, regarding spill in support of the Spring Creek Hatchery release. The issue that is being elevated to the IT has to do with the risk surrounding implementation of this operation, Henriksen said – specifically, what is the acceptable risk associated with implementation of this SOR, and how is that risk to be calculated? The SOR requests five days of 170 Kcfs flow at Bonneville, with spill up to 105% TDG over the Ives/Pierce Island redds, Henriksen explained; the SOR includes a provision for intensive monitoring. Henriksen noted that the 170 Kcfs total flow requested in SOR 2002-1 represents an increase of 45 Kcfs-50 Kcfs over the current average flow at Bonneville, which raises some concern about the likelihood of achieving the April 10 flood control elevation at Grand Coulee.

Our goal today is to explore the risks associated with the requested operation, and hopefully come to some resolution, Henriksen said. Is there agreement that the SOR as written is not implementable? John Palensky asked. The action agencies feel it is not implementable as currently written, Henriksen replied. David Wills said that, from the Fish and Wildlife Service's perspective, the SOR is both implementable and low-risk.

The issue really has to do with the fact that we need to store another five feet into Grand Coulee between now and April 10, Jim Litchfield observed; the operation requested in this SOR would draft Grand Coulee, at least for a few days. To me, said Ron Boyce, the real issue is how much flexibility exists in the system to implement this SOR – the action agencies have said it should be feasible to provide 150 Kcfs at Bonneville for three days, so why can't they provide 170 Kcfs for five days?

One participant noted that the March early-bird forecast is now available, and has decreased slightly at The Dalles, compared to the February final. What about the flexibility issue? Palensky asked. The flexibility that was identified at yesterday's TMT meeting is what we think we can provide, Jim Athearn replied – 150 Kcfs in total flow at Bonneville for three days. We are interested in doing what we can for the Spring Creek hatchery release, Athearn said, but looking at where we are today, and the best available forecast information, we've identified the volume of water we feel is available – that's the flexibility that exists if we're to maintain an acceptable level of risk with respect to April refill targets.

Boyce asked how the Corps defines "flexibility." Why isn't there enough volume throughout the hydro system, not just Grand Coulee, to implement this SOR? he asked. At yesterday's meeting, we went through the projects one by one – current and expected operations and current reservoir levels, Henriksen said. Based on that analysis, we expect average flows on the order of 120 Kcfs-125 Kcfs at Bonneville between now and April 10, she said; the flexibility we offered yesterday, in terms of the 150 Kcfs flow for three days at Bonneville, is pure risk. In response to another question from Boyce, Henriksen said the uncertainty associated with the current forecast at The Dalles is +/- 17 MAF. Once the March final forecast is released tomorrow, she said, we'll have better information.

The discussion turned to current power operations in the system; Scott Bettin said a combination of flood control drafts, meeting the minimum tailwater elevation at Bonneville, and steadily-declining forecasts are to blame for the current reservoir elevation situation. Boyce replied that, for much of January and February, flows well in excess of those required to meet the Bonneville minimum tailwater were running past Bonneville; up to 200 Kcfs. That was purely for power production, Howard Schaller observed. If meeting load is something we're not supposed to do, Bettin replied, then we need to revisit our entire operating purpose– there have also been many days when we could have saved 40 Kcfs-50 Kcfs, if we were just meeting load, rather than maintaining the minimum tailwater elevation at Bonneville.

Schaller said that, in his view, the purpose of today's call is to talk about risk. Kim Fodrea replied that, in her view, the purpose of today's call is to make a decision about the Spring Creek Hatchery release. Palensky agreed, saying that, while the past operations that contributed to the present reservoir elevation situation may be germane to a more in-depth discussion of the risk issue at a future IT meeting, today probably isn't the time to have that discussion. Athearn suggested that the group would be better served to look forward, rather than back, at this point in the season.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes. Ultimately, Silverberg suggested that, while further conversation about the decisions that have contributed to the current system operation and reservoir levels would be useful, today's meeting needs to focus on the decision issue.

Litchfield noted that, at yesterday's meeting, the action agencies offered a compromise: 150 Kcfs of flow at Bonneville for three days; the salmon managers' response was that, in their

view, implementation of SOR 2002-1 is all or nothing. Palensky said that, in NMFS' view, the SOR doesn't work as written. While we are willing to accept some risk, he said, particularly that associated with the uncertainty surrounding the forecast, we don't want to see listed species put at risk so that we can provide spill in support of a hatchery release, we are particularly concerned about the Mid- and Upper-Columbia stocks that got hammered last year.

Specifically, said Palensky, NMFS is willing to commit 200 KAF to the 2002 Spring Creek spill operation, as long as the 14.5-foot tailwater elevation is maintained at Bonneville, and tailwater TDG at Bonneville stays below 115%. That will increase the risk that Grand Coulee won't achieve its April 10 target elevation, Palensky said, but we're willing to accept that risk. An operation within those parameters could be shaped several ways, he said; it would be up to the TMT to decide how it should be designed. It was observed that 200 KAF in additional flow translates roughly to 150 Kcfs in total flow for 3+ days at Bonneville.

Boyce asked how NMFS had determined that 200 KAF was an acceptable risk at Grand Coulee. If we knew for sure that we were going to be 200 KAF short at Grand Coulee on April 10, that would not be acceptable to NMFS, Palensky replied. However, there is a chance that we won't fall 200 KAF short, depending on what the forecast does; in our internal discussions, that was the level of risk we were willing to accept. If it looks as though you're going to miss the April 10 target at Grand Coulee, would NMFS consider dewatering the redds? Litchfield asked. No, Palensky replied – we would want to keep the chum redds watered.

In response to a question from Litchfield, Schaller said it is a mischaracterization to say that the salmon managers have said the implementation of this SOR is an "all or nothing" proposition – rather, said Schaller, what we were saying yesterday is that the operation outlined in the SOR is our recommendation of what is best for this stock.

Where do we go from here? Silverberg asked. I need to hear first whether or not the action agencies have rejected SOR 2002-1, Schaller replied. The action agencies are willing to implement seven of the eight points in the SOR, Bettin replied – it's the eighth point we cannot fully implement. Boyce said that, to him, it is unbelievable that the action agencies are willing to provide protection, via spill, for only a quarter to a third of the Spring Creek Hatchery fish. To me, he said, five days of spill is the only thing worth discussing.

Schaller reiterated that, in his opinion, there is flexibility in April 10 vs. April 15; there is flexibility in how Libby is operated, and there is flexibility in ponding and release at John Day. We went through all of the projects yesterday, Litchfield replied – what we heard at yesterday's meeting was that any additional water will have to come out of Grand Coulee. It sounds to me as though Oregon is willing to accept a risk that Grand Coulee would be three to ten feet below its April flood control rule curve elevation in order to implement this operation, Jim Fodrea said. Actually, what I'm saying is that Oregon wants to fully explore the flexibility that exists in the system to implement this SOR, without jeopardizing the BiOp elevations, Boyce replied.

In response to a question from Schaller, Palensky said that NMFS will re-evaluate its 200

KAF recommendation once the new forecast is released tomorrow; however, that recommendation won't necessarily change even if the forecast goes down, as it is expected to do. In response to another question, Rudd Turner said that, based on the most recent passage survival analyses, the Corps estimates that about 100,000 additional juvenile Spring Creek Hatchery chinook will survive past Bonneville if 50 Kcfs spill is provided for a release group of this size (7.8 million fish).

Bill Tweit said Washington is very concerned about putting a deeper hole into Grand Coulee, particularly given the region's experience last year. At the same time, he said, the Spring Creek Hatchery releases are incredibly important, particularly to the ocean fishery. Given these facts, he said, it isn't easy for Washington to reach a recommendation on this issue. If push comes to shove, said Tweit, we would probably recommend that the water be conserved to help the upriver stocks later, rather than released now to help the Spring Creek fish. That said, said Tweit, we do want to see some spill provided for the Spring Creek juveniles, particularly early in their migration.

Fodrea suggested that the action agencies commit to providing a spill volume of 200 KAF, no matter what the new forecast says tomorrow; if the forecast goes up, he said, we could then consider increasing the spill volume at Bonneville. It was observed that 200 KAF represents approximately three feet of storage in Grand Coulee. Palensky replied that NMFS is willing to commit to no more than 200 KAF to support the Spring Creek Hatchery release; if tomorrow's forecast declines, NMFS reserves the right to revisit that 200 KAF volume, and revise it downward if necessary.

Schaller noted that while a portion of the IT considers this an acceptable compromise, another portion does not – in other words, he said, I want the record to reflect the fact that this is not a unanimous decision. The IT's task is to implement the BiOp, said Palensky; in the absence of consensus, it's up to NMFS to make the call as to the best way to implement the BiOp. In NMFS' view, he said, SOR 2002-1 is not implementable as written.

In all fairness, said Schaller, I think there are differing views about whether or not this SOR is implementable; it all comes down to how you view risk, and in the end, the fish are being asked to assume the majority of the risk. All we're trying to do is what's best for fish, Boyce added – that's what you have to set out first, before you can discuss any constraints the hydrosystem may impose. Boyce noted that he has heard rumors for some time that this is exactly the volume BPA was willing to provide; miraculously, he said, that volume is exactly what NMFS decides would be acceptable, in terms of risk. Palensky replied that NMFS didn't look at this issue in terms of spill volumes; it looked at it in terms of acceptable risk to the operations called for in the Biological Opinion.

Tweit suggested that, in future years, it would make sense to factor spill in support of the Spring Creek Hatchery release into the annual water management plan. Bettin replied that, while that is certainly an option, what has changed in the past few years is the need to protect the chum redds below Bonneville – we need to factor in the depth compensation needs for those redds, he

said. It would certainly be worth discussing, so that a more reasoned discussion of the tradeoffs inherent in the Spring Creek Hatchery spill operation can take place.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Palensky said the other participants have now heard NMFS' recommendations to the action agencies; it is now up to the salmon managers to decide how best to shape the available volume. Boyce replied that, in his view, there are other operational alternatives the action agencies could be looking at to allow fuller implementation of the SOR without impacting the BiOp operations.

We've been through that, said Athearn; what's on the table now – 200 KAF out of Grand Coulee, or 150 Kcfs of total flow for 3+ days at Bonneville – is the volume the action agencies are willing to make available for this operation. Jim Fodrea said that, from Reclamation's standpoint, there is no flexibility in Hungry Horse operations; the water for this operation will have to come out of Grand Coulee. In response to another question from Boyce, Jim Fodrea said Reclamation's other storage reservoirs are generally in worse shape than Hungry Horse.

What about the possibility of drafting John Day pool down to 262.5 feet? Boyce asked. That volume is available, Henriksen replied. You could then refill John Day pool once the spring freshet begins, and we're exceeding our flow targets, Boyce suggested. Henriksen noted that the volume available from John Day is the equivalent of 25 Ksfd; if that water is released, it would need to be returned fairly quickly -- within 2-3 days -- to maintain irrigation pumping viability. So there is no flexibility to go below elevation 262.5 feet at John Day, even though there is very little irrigation pumping going on during April? Schaller asked. That would not be acceptable to the irrigated agriculture contingent around John Day pool, Henriksen replied.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the question of whether the 200 KAF should be measured at Bonneville or at Grand Coulee, without reaching a definitive conclusion. What about Libby? Schaller asked – you could use some water from Libby now, then run it at a flat discharge to meet the April 10 flood control rule curve. Henriksen said the Libby water supply forecast has gone down; as a result, the April 10 flood control point has gone up, and the project is on a trajectory to go to minimum outflow this weekend.

So what's the IT's pleasure, Silverberg asked – do you want the TMT to talk about how to shape the available volume, or would the salmon managers prefer to take that task on? We've heard the decision from NMFS and the Action agencies, Boyce replied; I would like to say for the record that Oregon feels more could be done for fish this year. Boyce said the salmon managers will develop a recommended operation, as to how the available 200 KAF should best be used. It was agreed that the salmon managers will provide their recommendations to the action agencies by mid-day Monday, March 11.

In response to a request, Palensky repeated NMFS' sideboards for this operation for the record: 200 KAF total additional volume (above the 125 Kcfs average flow that would otherwise be provided at Bonneville), a 14.5-foot minimum tailwater elevation at Bonneville to ensure adequate depth compensation, and 115% tailrace TDG cap at Bonneville. The group discussed

the factors NMFS used to arrive at the 14.5-foot tailwater elevation; Palensky said NMFS is willing to consider an alternative tailwater depth proposal, if the salmon managers feel another approach would be more effective.

Henriksen asked that the salmon managers' proposal be provided to the action agencies by noon tomorrow; Boyce said that should be possible. It was further agreed that, if the new forecast shows a significant change, another conference call will be convened tomorrow afternoon.

Liz Hamilton reiterated the vital importance of hatchery releases like Spring Creek to the Northwest's commercial and recreational fisheries; she noted that operations that result in even small increases in survival are most welcome.

With that, today's conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.